Punctuation Marks
1. Full Stop (.)
2. Comma (,)
3. Apostrophe (’)
4. Semicolon (;)
5. Question Mark (?)
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7. Dash (–)
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10. Ellipsis (…)
11. Colon (:)
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Punctuation Card

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1. Full Stop — to mark the end of a sentence that is not a question or exclamation

The full stop is followed by a single space (typists may use two spaces) and a capital letter 37493

The train arrived late. I enjoyed watching the cricket match at Lord’s.

Used with abbreviations, but this use of the full stop is declining

i.e. (id est “that is”) e.g. (exempli gratia “for example”) et al. (et alii “and others”)

Mr. F. McQwerty and Ms. P. Mulvey were in attendance at the gala luncheon.

The British convention is to omit the full stop after abbreviations and initials

Mrs S Stephens, Rev WJ Gordon and Mrs B Blackburne were present at the ball.

No full stop is used in abbreviations of organisations or acronyms

BBC, DNA, FM, GMT, IBM, ITV, NATO, RSPCC, RSPCA, UK, USA, USSR, VAT.

No apostrophe is required in plural abbreviations or acronyms

CDs, CEOs, FAQs, GPs, GCSEs, MPs, JPEGs, PINs, Quangos, RMNs, RNs, URLs.

All the students did well in their GCSEs for the third year running.

Full stops are used to express time and decimal numbers

We are due to leave at 2 p.m. today. Buy a ticket for the 7 a.m. train. Divide the decimal number 25.82 by 100. Paula’s cookery book costs £30.15.

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2. Comma — listing, introducing, marking off words or clauses

Listing a series of words, clauses or phrases in a sentence *My Chihuahuas, Daisy and Della, are clever, cute and chic. My grandmother had a penchant for snook, snuff and snugs.*

Listing adjectives

Tina’s lovely, lush, lingering lilt beguiled and bewitched me.

After an introductory word or phrase in a sentence

When I opened the door, who should I see? The monster man!

If I write a book on numismatics, the sales will surely follow.

Separating non-defining or non-restrictive relative clauses in a sentence

The students, who gained good marks, were allowed home early.

The non-defining clause ***who gained good marks*** is incidental information. The sentence implies that all the students were allowed home early.

But *The students who gained good marks were allowed home early.*

Only the students who gained good marks were allowed to go home early as defined by the relative clause ***who gained good marks***.

The players, who played well, were given a free trip to Tonga.

The non-defining clause ***who played well*** is incidental information. The sentence implies that all the players were given a free trip to Tonga.

The players who played well were given a free trip to Tonga.

Only the players who played well were given a free trip to Tonga as defined by the relative clause ***who played well***.

Using a comma with the conjunctive adverb, *however*

Ethan’s idea for a book, however, remained just that, an idea.

However, he still went on a cruise to Malta to get over his failure.

But *However hard I try, I still can’t fathom infinity and parabolas.*

Using a comma to show contrast or compare statements in a sentence

I loathe vichyssoise, but my dog Dilly loves it.

I posted my tax returns on time, yet I was fined for being late.

Marking off people’s names or enclosing parenthetic information

Griselda’s mother, Mrs Toots, came out of the beautician’s and I greeted her with an invitation to lunch. She looked at me as if staring at a cobra and said, “I only have lunch with people I really like.”

Bill, Bobbie and Sue, gave me a bracing embrocation of jojoba oil and gripe water for my terminal twinges and lingering lassitude, with the sage advice to “Slap it on Jimmy, lad. Slap it on!”

Introducing direct speech in a sentence

I opened the door. The young woman smiled and whispered, “My name is Maria Conchita Navarra. You must return to Gris-Gris with me, now!”

The Oxford comma

The Oxford or serial comma is a comma before the final ***and*** in a list. The serial comma may be required to avoid ambiguity and to aid clarity in a sentence, especially where the coordinating conjunction ***and*** is used to conjoin the last items in the list.

I’m a fan of Norman Wisdom, the Marx Brothers, and Laurel and Hardy.

Tina cooked us both a meal of soup, fish, and macaroni and cheese.

The colours available are red, green, blue, and black and white.

3. Apostrophe — indicates possession of nouns or omitted letters

Showing possession with singular nouns

Jamilah’s books. The student’s writing skills. The boy’s new bicycle.

Gene Pitney’s songs are timeless. Janelle’s birthday party.

The doctor’s surgery. The boss’s bonus. The journalist’s source.

Showing possession with singular nouns ending in *s*

St Thomas’s hospital. Jones’s home. The witness’s testimony.

St James’s park. Dickens’s novels. Burns’s poems. Charles’s wife.

Showing possession with plural nouns not ending in *s*

The Women’s Institute. The men’s shops. The children’s wards.

Showing possession with plural nouns ending in *s*

The students’ exams. Others’ opinions. The bosses' bonuses.

The journalists' sources. The Joneses’ house. The boys’ bicycles.

Our neighbours’ garden. The millionaires' businesses. Nurses’ jobs.

For biblical or classical names the second *s* is usually not added

No extra syllable is sounded in pronouncing these possessives.

Jesus’ parables. Moses’ laws. Ulysses’ wife. Achilles’ heel.

Indicating a contraction of a word – *it’s, don’t, you’re, and others*

It’s [it is] a pity more people don’t take elocution lessons.

It’s [it has] been an indescribable experience writing this card.

Sorry to hear you’re [you are] leaving us to work in Spain.

We arrived at the theatre for the play, which began at eight o’clock

The word *its* is a possessive pronoun – no apostrophe is required

The committee took its time to discuss the new proposals.

My dog hid its bone in the garden. Can the dog wag its tail?

The company had its CEO arrested for rogue trading and fraud.

Do not use an apostrophe to create plurals

The MPs voted. The GPs concurred. I sold my CDs. The 1960s. FAQs.

Individual possession – use an apostrophe after each noun in the list

Bill's, Bobbie’s and Sue's pencil sharpeners are made of aluminium.

My mother-in-law’s and sister-in-law’s hats were ruined by the rain.

London’s and New York’s transport systems are very similar.

Joint possession – use an apostrophe after the last noun in the list

Bill, Bobbie and Sue's pencil sharpener is an electronic version.

My mother-in-law and sister-in-law’s holiday was ruined by the rain.

My aunt and uncle’s caravan was damaged in the storm.

Do not use an apostrophe with these absolute possessive pronouns

Its, ours, yours, hers, theirs. Meaning belonging to *it, us, you, her and them.* Note that ***it’s*** is a contraction of the words ***it is*** or ***it has***.

Note *Who’s [who is] there? Whose book is this? [Who owns the book?]*

No *s* is added after the apostrophe in some *for … sake* **expressions**

In order to create a harmonious or pleasing sound — euphony.

For goodness’ sake. For righteousness’ sake. For conscience’ sake.

But *For appearance’s sake. For experience’s sake.*

Showing possession with time values

Pay one week’s rent. Give four weeks’ notice. Three years’ experience.

But *She is now six months pregnant.* The word *pregnant* is an adjective.

Apostrophes with indefinite pronouns

It’s anybody’s guess. It’s someone else’s responsibility. Do one’s duty.

4. Semicolon — joins connected statements and phrasal lists

The semicolon joins independent but related statements in a sentence not joined by a conjunction to indicate a close connection.

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. [Dickens]

Let us honour him with a plaque; let us present him with a festschrift; let us continue his noble and honourable fight for fairness for all.

I used to be insufferable, but then I met Susana; now I'm ineluctable.

Separating phrases in a series or list

The teacher gave us some examples of oxymorons: an unselfish banker; a truthful politician; a ubiquitous grammarian; and free healthcare.

Used with the linking words *however, nevertheless, consequently*..

The swingeing cuts introduced by management were severe; however, no staff were made redundant on this occasion.

It may have been a pyrrhic victory; nevertheless, Ethan won the case.

My printer broke down; consequently, I had to resort to pen and ink.

5. Question Mark — asks a direct question

A question mark is used for all direct questions in sentences

How much do the tickets cost? Where can I find a good restaurant? Who ordered all this expensive stationery? Who called you just now?

No question mark is used in a sentence that has an indirect question

I wonder how many British bankers ended up in prison for fraud.
She asked me why I adored the late French actress Françoise Dorléac.

Request and demands do not require a question mark

Would you be quiet, please. Would you leave now, please. [Requests]
Will you be quiet! Will you please leave the room! [Demands]

6. Exclamation Mark — use to express strong feelings or emotions

Avoid using the exclamation mark when writing formal documents such as reports, statements, proposals, essays, CVs and so on.

Good heavens! Here's Johnny! It's show time! Yikes! Help!
Leave now! Stop! Be quiet! Look out! Run! It's behind you!

7. Dash — use to separate a phrase or comment in a sentence

Use a dash for emphasis or to signal a surprise or interruption

Griselda has just one passion in life – cobalt blue tarantulas. For my dog Boo and me there is only one sport – cricket. What McQwerty needed most he never got – a thrashing. There is no sport – absolutely none – more enjoyable than cricket.

Use a dash as a linking device in a sentence

My uncle was killed in the 1914–1918 war. **But** *From 1914 to 1918.*
Please refer to pages 6–28 for guidance on using apostrophes.
I wrote an A–Z guide to English grammar, which no one bought.

8. Parentheses — use to set off a phrase or clause in a sentence

Keep punctuation for the parenthesised text within the round brackets

Flinty McQwerty (who is he?) dispenses jokes of profound feebleness.
The English Grammar Card (a free guide) is available on the web, now.
Please bring galoshes (if you have a pair), a raincoat and a compass.

9. Hyphen — use to divide, combine and join words

Use to create compound adjectives

He is a top-class batsman and a happy-go-lucky character in the team.
The five-match one-day cricket series starts in 11 days' time.

Use for all compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine

Ninety-five commuters had never heard of the legend of Sisyphus.
I counted twenty-four misspellings in Flinty's Guide to Spelling book.

10. Ellipsis — indicates the omission of one or more words or phrases

Creating a trailing off effect

Emily boarded the yacht draped in a diaphanous turquoise kaftan.
McQwerty was easy to work with … most of the time.
The JJ Sisters sang about the three keys to a woman's heart.

11. Colon — introduces lists, contrasts, direct speech and amplifications

Introducing a list

The Eight Parts of Speech include the following word classes: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections.

Tina had three positive characteristics: wit, warmth and wistfulness.

Amplifying a previous clause

There is one exception to the rule: if the lawyer is used, knowingly or unknowingly, to commit or cover up a crime or serious fraud, then she can disclose what she knows.

My parthian shot to Griselda was quite telling: a solar-powered facial hair remover; a year's supply of tummy-tuck tights and a pot of putty.

Presenting a conclusion

All the coaching and training I gave to the APES members had one aim: to find and fine people who abuse and misuse apostrophes on signs.

The point I'm trying to make is this: punctuation helps your readers to understand what you are trying to convey in your writing.

Contrasting statements

Man proposes: woman disposes: peace reigns. Write less: edit more.

Introducing direct speech

Tina left with a question: "I will return, but will you wait for me?"

Biblical references and website addresses

Traditionally a colon is used between the bible chapter and verse(s)

The talking-donkey story is found in the book of Numbers 22:21-39.
Visit the website http:www.tes.co.uk

12. Quotation Marks — indicates the exact words spoken or quoted

Quotation marks, or inverted commas, are always used in pairs to enclose the words spoken by a person or taken as a quote from literature.

After the sherry trifle, I turned to my beloved, "Darling," I gushed, "your hair is like a herd of goats skipping down the mountainside and your teeth are like sheep bounding up from the dip." Griselda glared at me and growled, "Shut up, eat your prunes, and take Tubby for a walk!"

I asked Griselda if she had ever imagined in her wildest dreams that one day I would be the president of the Stop Neutering Our Baboons Society [SNOBS]. "Dickie," she said, "you never feature in my wildest dreams!"

When Griselda eventually left me because of what she called "involuntary servitude", I found solace and succour in the soothing and searing words of the poet Christina Rossetti: "Better by far that you should forget and smile, than that you should remember and be sad."

A quotation within a quotation — double, single, single, double mark.

Tilly asked, "Did Flinty say 'schadenfreude' or 'sauerkraut'?"

My mother urged me to ask Griselda to go blackberry picking with me. "Remember what that man said, 'Be bold and mighty forces will come to your aid.' Besides," my mother assured me, "she can only say no."

When I asked Griselda, she sneeringly replied, "Dickie, I would sooner use caustic soda as a moisturiser than be seen out with you!"

Punctuation can add the merit of clarity and vibrancy to your writing

While I waited for Tina, I glared at a passing greengrocer who was sporting a bright green tabard with the printed bold alliteration: " Abolish apostrophe's altogether!" [sic]

I cleared my nares and bawled at the brute: "I say, one should never use an apostrophe to create a plural noun; not even for assonance."

Suddenly, the illiterate dolt turned on me. "Apostate!" he yelped.

*In the ensuing fracas, I was bitten twice on my right pinna; separated from my all-weathers flip-flops (just a day old); my prized kidney donor card was defaced by a mutt – corgi – and my bronze pencil sharpener was contorted into a novel device for the instant depilation of people who still can't tell the difference between the words **its** and **it's**.*

When Tina found me with a hank of hair in my hand, she shrieked, " What the… I say, poppet, have you been imbibing to excess again?"